

A Brand from the Burning

True Story of the Secret Service

By COL. H. C. WHITLEY, Former Chief United States Secret Service



GEOGE Sheldon was an honest and industrious young man. Ingenious and possessed of a good education, he had acquired high excellence in the practice of the engraver's art.

In the winter of 1869 and '70 he was employed to do government plate work by a large bank note engraving company in the city of New York. Although conservative in many things, he was fond of display in dress and the enjoyment of high living. He took his dinners at a fashionable uptown restaurant. In the course of time he noticed that a seat on the opposite side of the table at which he usually dined was regularly occupied by a genteel appearing middle-aged man.

One day when there chanced to be no other persons sitting near, the stranger remarked that they ought to become better acquainted with each other. He then led the conversation in a manner to draw from Sheldon his name and business. When he learned that he was an engraver in the employ of a bank note company, he affected great surprise.

"An engraver? Indeed. Well, I am glad to know it. I want some work done in that line, but I was not certain where to apply. I am very particular about it, and would be willing to pay well for a good job."

"What is the subject?" Sheldon inquired.

"This," said the stranger, as he handed out the photograph of a pretty female face. "If it was nicely done what would it cost?"

"That depends on the fineness of the work. Anywhere from \$50 to \$200."

"The price is not so much an object with me as the quality of the work. I will pay liberally for a good job."

One hundred and seventy-five dollars was the sum finally agreed upon. When the engraving was completed and delivered the employer was so well pleased that he said he understood the price to be \$200, and insisted on paying that amount. Sheldon was afterwards supplied with a number of small jobs from the same source and was liberally paid for his work.

One day his patron suddenly broke out with the exclamation: "You are an excellent workman, and I am greatly surprised to see a man of your skill with the graver plodding along in this way when you could easily make your fortune in a short time if you were so disposed."

"How could it be done?"

"By making plates for bonds and money. You engrave the plates for certain persons. They pay you big money. You have nothing to do with the use they are put to."

This man who was adroitly tempting young Sheldon was the procurer, or to be more explicit, the capitalist of one of the most dangerous gangs of counterfeiters ever organized in this country. To Sheldon he was Mr. Devoe, but this was only one of the many names by which he was known to the different persons employed by him. He was the autocrat of all the counterfeiters and forgers of his day, and one of the few criminals that escaped physical punishment for their many misdeeds. He was discovered by the officers in the latter days of his life and it was a close race between them and the devil. The latter won. Devoe was a gifted manipulator of men, and he was successful in crazing young Sheldon's mind with visions of great riches. Sheldon quit the employ of the bank note company, and following Devoe's advice took lodgings at a house where the people were not inquisitive in regard to his business.

In the summer of 1871 a counterfeit \$10 treasury note made its appearance in most of the great cities of the country. To the untrained eye the note was a good fac-simile of the genuine. The lettering, the seal, the vignette and everything about it, except the eccentric lathe work, were quite perfect, but it was not difficult to discover by the use of a magnifying glass that the fine lattice lines were irregular. In the genuine these lines are made by machinery so perfect that it is impossible to imitate them by hand. A counterfeit note even to the practised eye may appear all right at a casual glance, but its base nature can be readily discovered by a careful examination of its eccentric lathe work.

The note of which I speak was an excellent imitation, but it was early discovered and its circulation checked. At this time the branch office of the government secret service of New York was being almost daily visited by persons offering information in regard to the various crimes against the government. There were many secrets, suspicions and surmises offered for sale at prices ranging from one hundred to a million dollars. The greater part of the informers were anxious to conceal their identity.

On one particular occasion my office was visited by a genteel appearing young woman. She came into the main office and requested a private interview with the chief. She was carefully veiled and cautious in her man-

ner. Her interview with me appeared to be more for the purpose of obtaining information than giving it. In the course of her conversation she inquired as to the disposition of persons arrested for counterfeiting and the results of confessions, etc. She hinted of a counterfeiting scheme, but she either did not know or was unwilling to give any definite information. I finally drew from her that she might be able to find out something that would be of service to the government. The conclusion I came to was that some of her family were in some way connected with counterfeiting and that she was seeking a way to check their operations and at the same time save them from punishment. I questioned her carefully but was unable to gather sufficient information to lead to anything tangible. I thought there was something worth looking after, but did not know just how to get at it. When she left my office she was followed by a detective, but the officer was unable to shadow her without giving himself away, as she repeatedly turned around and looked about as though she suspected she was being followed, and the detective finally lost sight of her.

Some weeks after this I received an anonymous note couched in somewhat singular terms. It was in a fine female hand and read as follows:

"To the Chief of the Govt. Secret Service, 56 Bleeker St."

Believing that confidential communications may be addressed to you without fear of exposure, I have determined to give you information that I

am sure will be valuable. This brief note may form an important leaf in the history of a life begun in the love-light of a fond home and endearing associations to end in a felon's cell, possibly in a felon's grave. To demonstrate the truth of what I say, go to No. — St., and examine for yourself."

It was a house that had long been considered undesirable, and located upon a fashionable street, that was thus brought to my attention. It was only a weak suspicion, but yet I thought it sufficiently pointed to warrant an investigation. It was soon learned that this house was occupied by an elderly gentleman, apparently a Russian or German, a tall young man of twenty-five or thereabouts, and a rather comely appearing young woman. In their coming and going they appeared much like other people. This particular house, however, had long been pointed out and stared at because of a great crime that had once been committed within its walls.

The Rhetschlags, as they were known, were a very secluded family. No one seemed to know where they came from or by what means they earned their livelihood. It was rare that any person had been seen to enter their door during the day time. While the detectives were on watch a young man of prepossessing appearance called at the house on two occasions in the evening, remaining a short time. When he left he carried a small bundle. It was also learned from the people on the other side of the wall that strange noises had been heard late at night. There was a clicking and jarring sound as of some one pounding upon the floor with a heavy instrument. The neighbors thought there might be something wrong, and that was all the thought they gave to the matter. Each night a bright light was seen gleaming from an upper window, and the shadows of persons moving to and fro were cast upon the closely-drawn window shade. The detective had slipped up to the

front door and put his ear to the key-hole. He heard the clicking and was positive that it was a printing press in operation. For a time I was undecided just what course to pursue. I finally concluded to employ a ruse to get into the house and learn what was going on. An excuse that was thought to be better than no excuse at all was invented to be offered in case of failure. It was known that the doors of the house were kept securely fastened and that any person ringing the door bell would be sighted and refused admittance.

The plan to overcome this difficulty was simple but effective. It was about the middle of the day when a light spring wagon containing a trunk was backed up to the front door of the Rhetschlag house. Two men dressed as laborers took the trunk out of the wagon and carried it up the steps close to the door. The bell was rung. Soon there was an eye at the peephole. The person thinking that the expressman had made a mistake in the house threw open the door to explain. The trunk was quickly thrust across the threshold and the two expressmen sprang into the hall. Two other detectives that had been hovering near were also admitted. Almost at the first glance I discovered that the young woman tending the door was the one that had called at the secret service office and vaguely hinted of a great counterfeiting scheme. I think the recognition was mutual. She bowed slightly in a half welcoming way as she placed her hand upon the stair rail. An elderly man at this moment

stepped into the hall from a side room. He had probably been taking a nap from which he was suddenly roused. I caught a glimpse of a piece of paper as he swiftly put it in his mouth. Springing forward I seized him by the throat. The young woman came to my assistance. She put her hand to the old man's lips and said: "Spei es aus, vater! Spei es aus, vater!"

He yielded and she handed me a bit of closely folded paper. On it was written: "I will bring the back at nine this evening—Sheldon."

The old man was placed in charge of one of the officers. The young woman now accompanied us upstairs and led us to a door that was locked. The key was turned from the inside. An entrance was demanded, but there was no response. Deliberating a few moments, the officers rushed against the door and burst it open. We found a young man in the room. There was a printing press, a quantity of printer's ink, a long table, a couple of chairs and a stove. But there was not a scrap of paper in sight, nor anything to show that counterfeiting was being carried on. There was plenty of suspicion, but we were unable to find evidence to warrant a conviction. One of the detectives chanced to put his hand on the stove. It was hot. On looking inside we discovered that a considerable amount of paper had been recently burned. A systematic search of the premises was now begun. Every nook and corner of the house was examined. We tore up the carpet and pried up the weak places in the floor. Every piece of furniture and every rag of clothes was searched. The detectives crawled under the roof and on top of it. They looked down the chimneys. Nothing of an incriminating nature was found.

The old man wouldn't talk. He shut his mouth tightly and shook his head to every question asked, and the young woman was dumb as an oyster. While the woman did not appear to be anxious to conceal anything from us, she said she was quite unable to ren-

der any further assistance. We were about to give up in despair and leave the house when one of the detectives, more suspicious and hopeful than any of the others, remarked: "There is only one place left. Let us try that hanging lamp."

Taking it down, we unscrewed the top. Here to our great relief we found several thousand dollars in counterfeit \$10 bills. They were newly printed. The old man now broke down and the woman began to cry. She said she had been working under orders from her father, but knew little of what was going on. She was sure that counterfeit money was being made here, but she did not know what was done with it. She was also aware that her lover was mixed up in the scheme. She was between the devil and the deep sea and was at a loss what course to take, but had finally concluded to become an informer.

I was satisfied I had obtained the bottom facts so far as the woman was concerned and that Sheldon, who was expected there that evening, would bring the back of the counterfeit. The father and brother had been doing the printing. If the old man now told me the truth, they had never been engaged in selling or passing the bogus stuff. They were not trusted with both of the counterfeit \$10 plates at the same time. When the face of the note was finished the plate for printing the back was brought and the face plate taken away. Sheldon was the man that brought the plates and took away the counterfeits. The young woman had assisted in these operations to a certain extent, but she had been doing this under pressure. She had now informed the officers and chanced the result.

The door bell was rung promptly at nine o'clock and Sheldon was admitted. When he was confronted with the situation, he wilted and staggered to a seat. His every faculty seemed paralyzed with blank despair. The woman threw her arms about him and pleaded with him to tell the truth. He now became greatly excited and declared in a trembling voice that he would make a clean breast of the whole affair and take what was coming to him. I listened to the recital of his story. It was the counterpart of the others. He hoped for wealth and a life of ease. It was an unhealthy longing, but the opportunity was so plausibly presented to him by the oily-tongued Devoe that he sacrificed his manhood and yielded to the tempter. Once within the hypnotic influence of this great procurer he was compelled to do his bidding. Now that he knew the worst he felt relieved. With a curl of his lip and a sudden elevation of his head his eyes met mine as he gave me his promise to surrender the counterfeit plates and to aid the government by every means within his power.

All classes of confederated criminals fear the squalor more than they do the detectives. In fact, it would be quite impossible to destroy a well-organized gang of counterfeiters without using one man against the other. For this reason I never hesitated while chief of the government secret service to act upon my own judgment. We arrested the counterfeiters without process of law, and used them to the best possible advantage to the government. The records of the secret service of the treasury department, will, if examined, show that the system of using one counterfeiter against another was successful. When a confederate who has for years been associated with others in crime, is made to confess and assist the government, he is more dreaded by his associates than any other force that can be employed.

Counterfeiting combines the worst features of fraud interwoven with the most cunningly devised modes of escape. The confederate is better booked and more fully equipped to undertake the unearthing of a gang of counterfeiters than the best trained detective.

I mention these facts that the reader may better understand the object I had in view in this case as in most others. Young Rhetschlag pleaded guilty and was sentenced to the penitentiary. His father was old and feeble. Upon his promise that he would never again engage in counterfeiting, I paroled him. The young woman had rendered good service and I did not attempt to hold her or to use her as a witness. Sheldon made important disclosures that enabled me to arrest several dangerous counterfeiters. He was weak and easily persuaded, but after using him on the witness stand against his confederates I did not think him dangerous to go at large. The bank note company was only too glad to employ him notwithstanding the fact he had been engaged in counterfeiting. Besides, Miss Rhetschlag, who had been so prominent in assisting in bringing young Sheldon upon the stool of repentance, and putting him in a way to redeem himself, was anxious to marry him. The consummation of this I made as one of the conditions of his release. It might have been a little out of order, but it turned out all right. A wedding soon followed.

I some time afterward received from Mr. Routwell, the secretary of the treasury, a letter saying that he had been informed that a certain engraving company doing government work, had in its employ a dangerous counterfeiter named Sheldon, and suggested that I attend to this matter at once. In reply to the secretary's letter I gave him a detailed account of the capture and release of Sheldon, together with my reasons for the same. My course met the secretary's approval, in fact I was commended for it. So far as I know Sheldon has since led an honest life. If he has ever violated the pledge he gave me, I have not heard of it.

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Counterfeiting combines the worst features of fraud interwoven with the most cunningly devised modes of escape. The confederate is better booked and more fully equipped to undertake the unearthing of a gang of counterfeiters than the best trained detective.

I mention these facts that the reader may better understand the object I had in view in this case as in most others. Young Rhetschlag pleaded guilty and was sentenced to the penitentiary. His father was old and feeble. Upon his promise that he would never again engage in counterfeiting, I paroled him. The young woman had rendered good service and I did not attempt to hold her or to use her as a witness. Sheldon made important disclosures that enabled me to arrest several dangerous counterfeiters. He was weak and easily persuaded, but after using him on the witness stand against his confederates I did not think him dangerous to go at large. The bank note company was only too glad to employ him notwithstanding the fact he had been engaged in counterfeiting. Besides, Miss Rhetschlag, who had been so prominent in assisting in bringing young Sheldon upon the stool of repentance, and putting him in a way to redeem himself, was anxious to marry him. The consummation of this I made as one of the conditions of his release. It might have been a little out of order, but it turned out all right. A wedding soon followed.

I some time afterward received from Mr. Routwell, the secretary of the treasury, a letter saying that he had been informed that a certain engraving company doing government work, had in its employ a dangerous counterfeiter named Sheldon, and suggested that I attend to this matter at once. In reply to the secretary's letter I gave him a detailed account of the capture and release of Sheldon, together with my reasons for the same. My course met the secretary's approval, in fact I was commended for it. So far as I know Sheldon has since led an honest life. If he has ever violated the pledge he gave me, I have not heard of it.

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der any further assistance. We were about to give up in despair and leave the house when one of the detectives, more suspicious and hopeful than any of the others, remarked: "There is only one place left. Let us try that hanging lamp."

Taking it down, we unscrewed the top. Here to our great relief we found several thousand dollars in counterfeit \$10 bills. They were newly printed. The old man now broke down and the woman began to cry. She said she had been working under orders from her father, but knew little of what was going on. She was sure that counterfeit money was being made here, but she did not know what was done with it. She was also aware that her lover was mixed up in the scheme. She was between the devil and the deep sea and was at a loss what course to take, but had finally concluded to become an informer.

I was satisfied I had obtained the bottom facts so far as the woman was concerned and that Sheldon, who was expected there that evening, would bring the back of the counterfeit. The father and brother had been doing the printing. If the old man now told me the truth, they had never been engaged in selling or passing the bogus stuff. They were not trusted with both of the counterfeit \$10 plates at the same time. When the face of the note was finished the plate for printing the back was brought and the face plate taken away. Sheldon was the man that brought the plates and took away the counterfeits. The young woman had assisted in these operations to a certain extent, but she had been doing this under pressure. She had now informed the officers and chanced the result.

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COPY FROM CHURCH

ECCLESIASTICAL STYLES AND THE CLOCHE HAT.

Paris Takes Millinery Inspiration From Bishop's Cap or Mitre—Means Greater Number of Small Hats—Thanks.

Paris seized upon the idea of Reboux, who was among the first, if not the first, of the great designers who borrowed a millinery inspiration from the church. And the Reboux word is law; there is no going behind that. Some whisperings as to the good



taste of copying the bishop's cap or the mitre for the head of frivolous beauties may have been passed around, but they failed to disturb the clever designers, busy with the new ideas, or the popularity of her productions.

The ecclesiastical colors—"prelat," "eveque" and "abbe"—which were so successful in the beginning of the season, paved the way for these shapes, and the chances are the fad is not a passing one and that we shall see this idea triumphing in spring mil-

SECRET OF THE BURLAP RUG

Puckering Can Be Avoided by Working Stitches Loosely—Pretty Effects Possible.

"Handsome than hooked, crocheted or woven rugs!" This was the exclamation that sent the eyes of all the club to Mrs. Brown's new burlap rug. And it really was a beauty.

"It was really very easy," said little Mrs. Brown, with a pretty blush; "I just cut out a square of blue burlap the size I wanted, and then I drew on it with crayon a close design of scrolls and spirals. Then I